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ABSTRACT

Two studies illustrate the concern that the connection between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices can be a troublesome one if beliefs are informed by formalist thinking related to truth and caring in the teaching conversation. Subjects, 21 middle school language arts teachers and 216 eighth-grade students were asked what they thought would constitute appropriate responses to a middle school student's request for feedback about his poem. In spite of their training and experience, the instructional strategies of the teachers were guided by formalist beliefs about what they believed to be sound pedagogy. As a consequence, they minimized the importance of what the student actually said in the poem. Truth was sacrificed in favor of caring, which was often interpreted as helping the child to feel good about his work and about himself independent of the work's merits. Honest criticism and instruction were minimized. In contrast, students themselves called out for honesty and for academic instruction and interpreted caring as receiving academic help. Few expressed formalist principles, and most argued that their teachers need not surrender truth, criticism, or instruction to express care and concern. They also revealed that they could and would see through their teachers efforts at impression management. Findings, interpreted within frameworks provided by S. Cavell's (1969) criteria for reciprocal conversation and J. Habermas' (1979) conception of the ideal speech act, suggest that caring for students should be inextricably conjoined with truth in the teaching conversation. (Contains 44 references.) (Author/TB)

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Running Head: What it means to care

THE PSYCHOLOGIZING OF LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION: TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO CARE

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Paper presented at the meeting of the
American Educational Research Association, Chicago, March 1997

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Abstract

Two studies illustrate the concern that the connection between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices can be a troublesome one if beliefs are informed by formalist thinking related to truth and caring in the teaching conversation. Twenty-one middle school language arts teachers and 216 8th grade students were asked what they thought would constitute appropriate responses to a middle school student's request for feedback about his poem. In spite of their training and experience, the instructional strategies of the teachers were guided by formalist beliefs about what they believed to be sound pedagogy. As a consequence, they minimized the importance of what the student actually said in his poem. Truth was sacrificed in favor of caring, which was often interpreted as helping the child to feel good about his work and about himself independent of the work's merits. Honest criticism and instruction were minimized. In contrast, students called out for honesty and for academic instruction and interpreted caring as receiving academic help. Few expressed formalist principles, and most argued that their teachers need not surrender truth, criticism, or instruction to express care and concern. They also revealed that they could, and would, see through their teachers' efforts at impression management. Findings are interpreted within frameworks provided by S. Cavell's (1969) criteria for reciprocal conversation and J. Habermas's (1979) conception of the ideal speech act.

THE PSYCHOLOGIZING OF LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION
TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' BELIEFS
ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO CARE

Research findings on the tenacity of teachers' beliefs suggest that the connection between these beliefs and teachers' instructional practices can potentially be a troublesome one (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Clark, 1988; James, 1899/1983; Lortie, 1975; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982). There are varied reasons for this. Perhaps a major one is the proclivity of individuals to turn the findings of research into formal principles, or *formalisms*, i.e., beliefs that become rules and precepts to be followed regardless of context (e.g., Cronbach, 1975; Dewey, 1929; Fenstermacher, 1979, 1986; James, 1899/1983; Levy-Leboyer, 1988). Such a proclivity can lead teachers to misinterpret and misapply the findings of educational research in such ways that the findings, disjoined from their contextual safeguards, become one-size-fits-all recipes for instructions.

Another reason for the potentially troublesome alliance between belief and practice is the unintentional but clearly evident quest by theorists and practitioners for nomothetic educational and psychological theories, that is, theories that purport to explain regularities in behavior and thought taken to characterize human functioning. Although in these constructivist times no one disputes Austin's (1962) premise that "it takes a meaning to catch a meaning," we suspect that formalist instruction and the quest for nomothetic theory are prevalent enough in psychology classes and teacher education programs to be a cause for concern. After all, for all that psychologists routinely deplore stereotyping and decontextualism, a fair amount of what is transmitted as theoretical content in psychology and education courses consists of learning how to decontextualize — how to categorize behavior, personality, thinking styles, and environmental events in the abstract terms that various theoretical formulations employ and that psychological research thrives on.

As a result of these conditions, it is not unusual for individuals to disregard Cronbach's (1975) caution that "we cannot store up generalizations and constructs for ultimate assembly into a network" (p. 123). Consequently, they fail to appreciate that, "when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion" (p. 125). The danger, then, if we may paraphrase James (1885/1975), is that teachers will use formal principles

and personal theories about what constitutes appropriate instruction as answers to enigmas in which they can rest rather than as instruments that they can use if the context is appropriate.

In earlier studies, Bengston and Pajares used the following teaching problem to illustrate their concern that formalistic beliefs can work to constrain key decisions made with respect to education (Bengston, 1990; Bengston & Pajares, 1996; Pajares & Bengston, 1995):

> *"An 8th grade language arts teacher is interested in students learning to be poetically expressive. S/he assigns them the task of composing a free verse poem. A 13-year-old boy submits the following:*
>
> > *When the wild west winds are blowing*
> > *the tall trees will tremble.*
> > *When heavy rains fall from the skies*
> > *and a torrential downpour hits the earth,*
> > *when the tall trees are struck with lightning*
> > *and whole forests catch on fire,*
> > *that is when we feel nature at its greatest.*
>
> *After the teacher reads it, the student asks, 'Do you like it? Is it good?' How ought the teacher to respond?"*

In a sense, the vignette is the teaching equivalent of a Kohlbergian moral dilemma and representative of the ill-defined problems that are part of a teacher's daily fare.

When this problem was initially posed to students in an educational psychology course, the aim was simply to have them experience the burden of judgment that goes with teaching (Bengston, 1991). But few of the students experienced it as a dilemma. Most believed that the poem should be praised unequivocally, and they justified their view by pointing to the psychological good that would result (e.g., "The teacher should say yes, he or she likes the poem because you have to keep the child motivated and build the child's self-esteem."). Others cited a specific psychological theory as their inspiration:

> According to Erikson's psychosocial stages, this child has just come out of the industry versus inferiority stage. By the age of 13, he should already have developed his self-confidence level. However, in the stage that he is in now, identity versus role confusion, one needs to find continuity in his personality. Maybe if this boy was encouraged by the teacher, he could find a nitch [sic] within poetry. This could lead to the student creating a positive identity. (p. 355)

What was problematic about this imagined instruction was not so much the nomothetic theorizing displayed as the fact that the instruction was not responsive either to the young writer's

work or to his questions. Most students' replies were driven by similar formalisms that relieved them from having to consider either the local context or the poem's meaning.

Their interest in the preparation of teachers prompted Pajares and Bengston (1995) to present this problem to preservice language arts teachers in language arts methods classes to see if the formalistic thinking observed in Bengston (1991) might not have been largely a function of students being enrolled in an educational psychology course and so feeling the responsibility to respond "psychologically." Despite their literary interests and training in writing instruction, the majority of preservice language arts teachers substituted gratuitous and patronizing talk for critical candor and genuine instruction. Although well-meaning, their responses were primarily based on homely platitudes and facile psychologisms rather than on sound instructional principles. Formalistic beliefs were rampant and accompanied by a principled neglect of the poem. The students' concerns were with what they understood to be the psychological well-being of the child — his self-esteem, budding creativity, need for praise and encouragement, stage of development, and so on. Five formalisms characterized their responses: a teacher must always respond positively; students should, above all, be praised and encouraged; criticism is the enemy of creativity; evaluative questions should be redirected to the student; and the value of poetry is relative and cannot be judged.

Pajares and Bengston (1995) wondered whether the instructional predispositions that the psychology students and preservice teachers espoused would also be espoused by *experienced* language arts teachers, especially in light of Wolf and Gearhart's (1994) warning that

> although many elementary teachers are adept at connecting children, text, and topic, they often stop short of analysis. They experience literature with their students without critiquing it; they assign narrative writing without analytically responding to their students' narratives. (p. 427)

To illustrate this point, Wolf and Gearhart described the teaching practices of a language arts teacher who "feared that critique would discourage her young writers, explaining that anything the children wrote should 'be praised verbally or on paper'" (p. 436). The researchers found that the feedback often given to students by their teachers did not provide the kinds of substantive assistance students needed to guide their growth as writers. Despite their belief that, when teachers and their students take on the roles of professional critic, reader, and writer, writing will profit, Wolf and Gearhart conceded that these were roles not easily undertaken by teachers. This

is consistent with Prawat's (1985) and Weinstein's (1989) finding that teachers assign an inordinately high priority to affective/social concerns, rather than cognitive ones, in instruction.

It seemed a logical next step, then, to talk with experienced, middle school language arts teachers, for they embody the fictitious teacher directly confronted by the young poet in our scenario. The purpose of our study was to discover whether their training and experience in literature and language arts methods and their years in the classroom would save them from the formalist thinking and psychologizing engaged in by the psychology students and preservice teachers in previous studies. In addition, we were interested in discovering whether or not their teachers' beliefs about what constitutes an appropriate response to this teaching dilemma were discrepant with those of their own middle school students. Essentially, we ask how literary interests are faring against formalist beliefs in the struggle for the minds and professional dispositions of language arts teachers and their students.

Two issues frame our investigation. The first deals with the role of *truth* in the teaching conversation. To better ground this issue, let us first admit that we construe teaching as a rhetorical transaction that depends for its success on teachers having the command of language to mean what they say and to call others to do likewise. This phrase is borrowed from Cavell's (1969) essay, "Must We Mean What We Say?" and we presume with him (and with Austin, 1962; Hearne, 1986; and James, 1885/1975) that one's utterances must have meaning to others — be *true* (in the sense of honoring available evidence), *significant*, and *comprehensible* — if there is to be the mutual trust and regard upon which social well-being depends. If any of those criteria are not satisfied, then what is spoken has been said but not meant.

When conversants require that this meaning be part of their discourse, the result is what Habermas (1979, 1984) described as the *ideal speech situation*--a conversation in which candid communication flourishes and in which teachers use reason, scholarship, and professional expertise to help students improve whatever craft is being learned. In Habermas's ideal speech situation there are four validity claims, or criteria, for a speech act. As it is for Cavell (1969), the first validity claim is *truth*, in the sense that what is spoken should be factual, as best the speaker knows it to be so. Those in charge of pupils have the clear responsibility to be, as Schutz (1970) described, well-informed in matters of their craft. The second claim, *comprehensibility*, requires that what is communicated be accessible to and understood by the listener. To this end, teachers have the responsibility of ascertaining what their students are capable of understanding. The

third claim requires that speakers be *sincere* in their utterances and show good faith in their actions. As a consequence of this claim, the listener learns to trust the intentions of the speaker. But trust must be reciprocal — to be sincere, speakers must also trust their listeners. Last, it must be right for speakers to perform the speech act, in the sense that their claim to the communication is *justifiable*. For teachers, this requires that they know and understand the nature and import of their discourse — what is usually referred to as subject-matter expertise — and that they have met the first three criteria. It is largely this last claim that makes a communicative act, to use one of Cavell's (1969) criteria, significant. When the validity claims are not realized, speech acts can and should be rejected.

When meaning is viewed this way, instruction has the earmarks of a vigorous conversation in which the "talk" gets sharper as participants advance their understanding of the matters at hand and of each other. The moral and aesthetic overtones to this formulation are not incidental.

> Talking entails care and care-taking. That is part of what respecting one another means. Other sorts of linguistic confrontation, such as marital battles and various forms of preaching and opining, are not talking. The syntax of them is not the syntax of what we have in mind when we say, 'At last, someone to talk to!'" (Hearne, 1986, p. 21)

It is this passage from Hearne (1986) that frames the second issue of our investigation: the meaning of *caring* in the teaching conversation and its relationship to truth and to instruction. Most educators accept the view that caring for students is a moral and cultural imperative. In education, as in other disciplines, caring is a value, a belief about how we should interact with students (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995). Preservice and inservice teachers cite caring as the most important trait of a good teacher, but, when asked to describe such a teacher, enabling students to acquire subject matter expertise or developing strategies for learning are typically omitted from such descriptions (Weinstein, 1989). Conversely, students identify receiving academic help with their school work as the highest ranking category of the caring behaviors that teachers can exhibit in a classroom (Bosworth, 1995). Our question in this regard was whether certain teacher beliefs and implicit assumptions might create formalist lenses that are used to view the nature of caring and its relationship to truth in instruction.

Methods and Data Source

Study One. Twenty-one middle school language arts teachers were interviewed about how they believed they would respond to the student in the poem dilemma. The teachers were employed throughout seven public schools in a suburban county located in a major metropolitan area of the Southeast. Each had taught between 2 and 30 years, and their combined experience averaged 15 years. All but four of the teachers were women. The second author, herself a middle school language arts teacher and doctoral student, conducted open-ended interviews from a semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews were held at the schools in which the respective teachers worked. The researcher began the interview by requesting a response to a copy of the teaching problem, which was available for reference. Follow-up questions encouraged elaborations and justifications of the instruction recommended or the principles identified. If not volunteered, the researcher elicited judgments about the writer's work to see whether these were consistent with the feedback the teachers thought appropriate to provide. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and responses were coded and analyzed by both researchers in keeping with previous procedures (Pajares & Bengston, 1995) and with case study methodology (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989).

Study Two. We posed the same teaching problem to 216 8th grade students attending a public middle school also in the Southeast. Of these, 47 had just completed a unit on poetry. The problem was read aloud by the second author to groups of students in their language arts classes and also presented to them in written form. Students were asked to provide their response in an in-class essay which they were told would not be graded or seen by their classroom teacher. Classroom teachers were not present during the essay's completion. We hoped, in this way, to receive responses reflective of personal beliefs. Anonymity was ensured. The researchers coded and analyzed responses in keeping with previous procedures (Pajares & Bengston, 1995) and with case study methodology (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989).

Results

Study One

To better frame the responses of the teachers in our study, it is useful to revisit the five formalisms that had characterized the responses of participants in earlier studies. The two formal principles most mentioned by psychology students and preservice teachers in those studies were

that (a) the teacher should always find something good to say and generally offer *positive feedback* and that (b) regardless of a poem's merits, a teacher must *praise* the poet for his effort and attempt at creativity. The three additional formalisms were that (*c) criticism is the enemy of creativity*, with criticism generally perceived as a negative and hostile attack on the writer, that (d) teachers should not answer the young writer's questions but, rather, should *redirect the question to the student*, and that (e) *the value of poetry is relative* and cannot be judged. For this reason, most expressed the view that teachers' subject matter knowledge and literary expertise cannot play a significant role in instruction. Psychological constructs such as positive reinforcement or self-esteem were in ample evidence. One strong theme that emerged from the responses of preservice teachers was the sense of duplicitous honesty in which they would engage. They were prepared to tell the young poet the "truth" only if that truth were positive and would not offend. That is to say, they seemed unable to differentiate between an honest response and an honest "positive" response. Most of the previous respondents would not answer with sincerity the poet's questions, "Do you like it? Is it good?"

The responses of the teachers in our study differed in tone from those of their preservice counterparts, although, as we will illustrate, they did not differ in substance. Clearly, the teachers' knowledge both of the craft of poetry and of the instructional strategies at their command was in greater evidence and more in keeping with that expected of experts in these matters. In fact, let us acknowledge up front and with some emphasis that most (although not all) of our respondents noted that, at some point in the process of dealing with students such as our young poet, they would likely engage in what would quite reasonably be considered sound instructional practices. For example, several said that they would discuss with the student his use of various aspects of the craft of poetry — poetic devices such as imagery, alliteration, metaphor, and personification; the meaning of certain lines; the choice of words to convey meaning; economy of language; rhyme and structure; even the use of punctuation. One said that she "would challenge him to think about what kind of verbs he's used"; another would evaluate and discuss "obvious things like triteness . . . and originality, descriptive adjectives or metaphors or similes." One did not provide specific instructional strategies but made it clear that instruction would take place: "If I don't like it, I am going to point out the good things about it and point out what could be done to make it better." A teacher with seven years of experience with 8th graders described the imagined process eloquently.

> I want people to realize that poetry can on one level go a lot deeper and it touches us at our core. It is in some ways a more valid expression of deeper thought than prose because you have to find the exact right word and be as sparse as possible in conveying that. That takes a lot of work. That takes a lot of struggle, and I think that kids ought to struggle with getting it to that level.

Five observed that, prior to assigning written work, they would acquaint the student with a "rubric," or set of criteria created by the teacher on which the student could evaluate his own work. The teacher could then "go through the rubric and look at the different categories and creativity and [see] if their explanation is thorough." Only four of the teachers failed to mention, in some form or other, instructional strategies that could take place.

Even when prepared to engage in instruction, however, the imagined instructional practices of the teachers in our study took lower priority to the imagined psychological moves they would make and to the formalistic beliefs that emanated from them. When instruction was imagined, it was generally hedged in such a way that, should the poet run any manner of psychological risk by having his poem criticized, instruction would be either withheld or camouflaged. Moreover, the formalisms evidenced by preservice teachers and psychology students were not only evidenced by teachers in our sample but often stated with the firmness and conviction borne of experience.

As was the case in earlier studies, most prominent among the formalistic belief was that *a teacher must always respond positively*, which was voiced by 18 of the 21 respondents: "I feel a teacher should respond first of all by giving as many positives as possible so as not to have a student feel she is being very critical of the writing." Essential to what several called the student's need for positive feedback was that such a response be the first thing a student hears: "Start with the good things and give him some warm fuzzies." One teacher was specific about how this can be accomplished.

> I always start off by saying what I like about the poem. Not necessarily do I say it's a great poem or a good poem. But I say, okay, you've had some good use of alliteration. You had some fairly good imagery. You had some good active action verbs and it gives us a good picture of what's going on. I try to avoid saying it's good because good doesn't mean anything.

Eight teachers observed that, even when something positive to say becomes a difficult enterprise, a teacher "should always find something positive"; "I think you can find something positive in anything they do, and that encourages them to continue. If the first thing they get is negative,

they're just going to shut down"; "My first impulse with a student when they say, 'Is it good?' is yes. If you've written it down, it's good." One theme that ran through these responses was that, if there is little to praise, praise the effort: "I think you can always find something good in a child's writing. I mean, if the child has really put forth an effort. And, obviously, if he's written seven or eight lines, he's put forth some effort." The obvious well-meaning intentions of a 22-year veteran are poignant: "You can find good things if you look hard enough. Everywhere." Another veteran observed that

> poetry is not natural for an eighth grader. You know, writing something else might be, but a poem is not natural. They are usually very proud of it, and they want you to be proud of it too and so you have to find something that you're proud of.

Responding positively was viewed as essential to providing "positive reinforcement" and nurturing "self-confidence" and to helping the student grow and develop as a secure individual because students "feel insecure. A lot of times their whole psyche is on the line"; "they're just wanting approval"; and it is likely that "what [the poet] really wants is for you to love what he's done." One teacher with eight years of experience with middle school students put it this way.

> I would always say that I like [the poem] because I think that they need it. I think they need that. And he's proud and he's expressed himself, and he's worked on it and that would be encouraging him.

Several expressed the view that the student's questions betrayed such insecurities: "If a student would ask me do I like it, that would immediately let me know that the student was very, very insecure perhaps about what they wrote." One teacher suggested that "the poem is a valid expression of that kid's emotional state of being at that time and/or their attempt to gain approval from an adult figure."

Although the second formalism most often expressed by preservice teachers was that teachers must praise the poet regardless of the poem's merit, experienced teachers mentioned another formal principle with greater frequency — that *criticism is the enemy of creativity*. Fourteen of the 21 teachers expressed the belief that a teacher can easily "crush [the students'] creative abilities" or that critical commentary will "turn them off to writing" or "nip a budding poet right there." Various reasons are offered for this. Argued one teacher: "[Middle school students] are at a very sensitive place in their lives, and if you criticize them it is possible that

they may never write poetry again." Another warned that criticism, especially if harsh, is dangerous because

> when you do that to a child, when you start out negatively, you have absolutely turned him off towards anything as far as not only this poem is concerned, but anything else. And you've turned him off to you, to the teacher.

Another suggested that criticism leads to a student "shutting down." The result can be damaging.

> I remember that delightful book, *Up the Down Staircase*, where a child submitted a love letter to a teacher she had a crush on, and the teacher criticized it. The kid threw herself out a window as a result.

Some projection may be evident in the comment that "when I show somebody my writing, I don't want the first thing that comes out of their mouths to be criticism." A 29-year veteran warned that

> You need to be very careful that no matter what you think about the piece, that your body language and what you say doesn't give some kind of negative back to the student so that the student doesn't want to continue.

Voiced by 12 of the 21 teachers was the belief that *evaluative questions should be redirected to the student*. Moreover, they expressed clear discomfort with answering the child's questions. One teacher with over 20 years of teaching experience explained that, if she did not like the poem,

> I would redirect it. I'm smarter than the children so I can find a way to never answer that directly . . . I would be crazy if I didn't redirect the entire question. And they wouldn't know that I didn't like it. But I wouldn't say it directly.

In nearly all cases, this redirection was accompanied by the observation that the student should put little stock in the teacher's opinion of this matter, for this opinion "really doesn't matter." Asked one teacher, "Who am I to say that I didn't like it?" Another expressed a similar sentiment: "Who am I to mess with that? Who am I to mess with that creative talent they wanted to share with me?" Another observed that "I would say, 'It doesn't matter if I like it. It matters if it conveys what you're trying to say. You're the best judge of what you write.'" A teacher we will call Mr. Jones would tell the student that "as far as if Mr. Jones doesn't like something you've done, so what? He's just a teacher." This surrender of professional expertise was viewed necessary so as to "empower" the young poet and "give him ownership of his work." One teacher explained that she did not "want to portray my meaning upon their poetry."

The formalisms that *students' work should, above all, be praised and encouraged* and that *poetry is a relative enterprise that cannot be evaluated* were each expressed by 11 of the 21 teachers in our sample. This first of these was expressed with statements such as "I think a general response would be 'Yes, it's good . . . the fact that you made a good effort.'" One teacher observed simply that "my criteria is that they made an effort, and if they are coming close, and have come half a mile, then they get the full reward, because I want them to try the other half." The recurring theme on this regard was that praise was necessary to "try to boost them up and let them think that they've got some potential."

The relativism of poetry was conjoined with the perceived incapacity of teachers to evaluate students' work in this area. A teacher with over 20 years of middle school language arts experience observed that

> poetry is a very personal thing, and I am very, very careful to be critical of people's personal things. That's quite different than teaching composition, where things are pretty much cut and dried.

Another experienced teacher agreed that "I'm not very critical of poetry because I think that poetry is personal." Consequently, when teacher judgment on these matters is exercised, it is likely to be "too arbitrary." A third teacher made the point that

> good is such a subjective word. I mean, some people consider, for example, T. S. Eliot to be a good or great poet. Some other people may say Shel Silverstein is a good or great poet. It's a matter of taste.

One teacher would tell the student that he liked the poem, but would caution that he liked it "by my standards, my amateur standards."

As is evident from the responses illustrated, our sample of teachers was split over the question of whether to answer or not answer the young poet's questions, though most agreed that they would not. Ten would tell him that they liked his poem, although five of these argued that they would always answer yes to such a question even if they did not like the work submitted. One of these would respond to the student in a manner similar to the way one might react when confronted by an aunt wanting an opinion on her ugly hat — "This is a unique poem . . . very interesting . . . an unusual way to approach your subject matter." Seven teachers argued that a teacher should never answer such questions. Only six would tell the young poet that the poem was good; the others hedged on the meaning of good, expressed concern about poetic relativism, or felt strongly that these sorts of questions should never be answered.

Having illustrated how the teachers responded, we wish also to illustrate how they did not respond. Only two of the teachers explored with the interviewer any matters that may have had a bearing on understanding more fully the local conditions attached to the poet and his poem. Here is the response of one young teacher to the question "Suppose you didn't like the poem? What would you say?"

> Well, really it would depend on the student on how honest I would be or how. If it was a good student that I knew did excellent work and I knew did much better, I would tell them, "Well, you know, I don't feel like this is one of your best writings." I would comment in that way. Someone who struggled with writing and who was not good at writing, no I would say this: "This is a start. I like this. There are some things that you can improve on but I think this is . . . " So it would depend on the student.

Another agreed that the response would depend on the child and the relationship that the teacher and student had developed.

> I guess if I knew the kid better, and we had a really kind of good rapport, I might say, "Geez Laura, what are you on? Now you've done a lot better than this. Did you copy this from somebody else?" And again, if I know the kid, I can get away with that and the kid knows that I'm trying to get at something.

In other words, only two teachers acknowledged that any of their imagined responses would "depend" on the nature of the child, his prior knowledge, his temperament, the situation, their relationship. Even these two teachers, however, embedded these brief acknowledgments within a broader structure of responses heavily laden with unsituated formalisms.

Study Two

Three findings distinguished the students' voices from those of their teachers and from those of the college undergraduate respondents in earlier studies. The first was that the formal principles we have outlined above were voiced by few of the 216 8th graders. To this end, let us first dispense with four of the formalisms found in previous studies and with the teachers in our study, for very few of the students expressed them. Only 7 (3%) students said that the poet should, above all, be praised and encouraged or that the teacher should praise effort. And only another 7 suggested that such evaluative questions should be redirected to the poet. Perhaps because of their age, only 10 (5%) believed that poetry is a relative enterprise that cannot be evaluated. Indeed, they had little difficulty evaluating it and wrote, often quite impressively, about specific criteria that could be used. Only 16 (7%) expressed that teachers must always

respond positively. This is not to say that the students did not imagine scenarios in which the teacher responded positively to the young poet's request for feedback about his poem. Rather, this is to say that the students neither had any expectations that this positive feedback was somehow essential to sound instruction nor did they seem to believe that such a response should be the first thing a student hears. When students suggested that the teacher should be positive it was because they believed that the teacher would indeed like the poem and think it good; hence they expected the teacher to provide an honest reaction of this appraisal. Moreover, such reactions are generally accompanied by suggestions for improvement or reflection. A typical response:

> I think the teacher should respond by telling the student that they did a good job on the poem, but that they should have expressed themselves more. The teacher should respond like this because the poem was good and the idea was fine, but the student should have put more feeling in it, like if they were there and put more detail into it.

Regarding the fifth formalism, unlike their teachers, students neither perceived that criticism was the enemy of creative endeavors nor that criticism need be harmful to emotional growth. Only 4 students (2%) expressed this sentiment, one in a manner very similar to what the teachers and previous participants had expressed: "The teacher should say yes and she shouldn't say it's bad because it might bring their self-consciousness down. Then they won't try because then they'll think it's bad and not try ever again."

However, what 32 (15%) students did express was the view that teachers should take precautions with their critical comments so that they *do not hurt a young writer's feelings*. Generally, this concern was accompanied by the observation that instruction was required, and that this instruction would quite naturally be provided by critical commentary of the merits of the poem. For example: "I think the teacher should give his/her true opinion using constructive criticism to make sure the student's feelings are not hurt." One student sensed that the issue of *trust* was at the core of this process.

> In this specific case, I think it depends on the teacher's preference to how he or she liked the poem. If the incident described were to happen to me, I would want the teacher to respond in an honest yet positive way. The teacher should let the student know how he or she feels about the poem without hurting the pupil's feelings. I think it is important to be honest while being a teacher, because if you are not the student will not be able to have a sense of trust for the teacher.

Most students were able to distinguish between what a teacher does and how a teacher does it: "I think the teacher should say the good stuff about the poem and then correct things you did wrong in a very nice way, not putting you down when she is correcting your poem." Indeed, the manner in which a teacher is able to provide the critical commentary required for skill development was viewed by some students as related to questions of mutual respect: "I think the teacher should say what they think. But say it in a respectful way." But, given the choice between dishonesty and the potential for hurt feelings, one student argued that "if the teacher says yes she/he likes it so they don't hurt the kid's feelings, the kid will write like that again." We believe that two students put the matter simply and eloquently: One argued that "the teacher should tell the student how to improve the poem gently"; another cautioned the teacher to tread carefully so as not to "break the poet's little heart."

Two other findings made the students' voices unique from those of their teachers and from the voices of the college students in previous studies. The first was the students' overwhelming agreement (183/85%) that the teacher should answer the young poet's questions. The majority of teachers and 80% of the preservice teachers in Pajares & Bengston (1995) would not answer the young poet. The second finding was that many of the students specifically suggested that truth, significance, comprehensibility, and instruction be part of the teaching conversation in which student and teacher should engage. As we have foreshadowed, 60 (28%) of the 8th graders in our study explicitly expressed the view that *the teacher should respond honestly* to the student's request for feedback. One youngster saw the connection between truth and skill improvement this way:

> I think the teacher should respond truthfully. If the teacher likes it and thinks it's good, they should tell the student what they liked and why. If the teacher didn't like it and doesn't necessarily think it's good, then they should, in a constructive way, tell them how to improve. They should do this because a student needs to be told if some things aren't quite as good as possible.

Another student connected the issues of respect and consideration for feelings that we earlier illustrated with the need for honesty and criticism: "I think the teacher should speak her mind. I also think the teachers should be considerate of the student's feelings. The teacher should note the student's feelings; the student should learn by constructive criticism. Honesty is the best policy."

Many students also made the connection between honesty and the student's need for clarity and skill improvement: "The teacher should give her honest opinion and tell the student what they could improve on. That way they will know what they need to work on for the next time they write a poem"; "The teacher should say if she liked it and if she didn't she should help him/her to make changes and corrections. So that the student knows and isn't confused about anything"; "I think that the teacher should respond truthfully. If the teacher doesn't like it then she should tell the student why she doesn't like it, but not be negative about it. If the teacher is truthful, then maybe it can improve the student's poetry." One youngster put it this way:

> I think the teacher should say the truth. I don't think a teacher should ever lie to a student and say their work is good when it stinks. A student needs to know the truth so they can keep working to do the best work they can. They should also ask the students questions so they can think for themselves.

In fact, contrary to what one of the teachers in our study had expressed, when teachers deceive, the deception can be evident:

> The teacher should respond by telling the student the truth. If the teacher does not like this poem very much, she shows it somewhat by not knowing how to respond. The teacher should tell the student what she really thinks about the poem. If she tells him the truth, the student will know to improve in the future. It might hurt the student's feelings, but it is better than telling a lie.

Students are also aware of the fact that such deceptions have consequences.

> I think the teacher should respond in an honest opinion because if she just says that it is good when she doesn't mean it you'll be embarrassed when other people that read it say it was bad. But if she gives you an honest opinion you'll know what to correct before showing it to other people.

A few perceptive students were able to express what only two of the teachers in the study and none of the respondents in previous studies had touched on — that they appreciated Cronbach's (1975) cautions regarding local conditions and the need for a generalization to be simply a working hypothesis and not a conclusion. They noted the appreciation of context by suggesting that different students might require different responses.

> The teacher should respond different to each different person. Cause one student could be extra sensitive on criticizing and another could just honestly want to know the truth. If the student is sensitive, the teacher should respond "This is a very nice poem, but it could use just a little more work . . . here, I'll help you." This way the student's feelings don't get hurt and he/she makes the poem better. If the student isn't as sensitive, the teacher should respond "I think this is nice, but if you're reaching for an A you should go over it again." This way the student

> gets it direct that they should keep trying. Usually, the student gets the opinion and if it's bad tries to fix it.

One student recognized that the local condition might well deal with the young poet's level of expertise: "I think 'do you like it?' and 'is it good?' are two very hard questions to answer because it depends on if you think this is the student's best work." Another argued in a similar vein.

> The teacher should say yes or no on what they thought about the poem. The teacher should also give a reason for their answer. The teacher should think about who the student is. If they believe that for that student it was a good poem, they should say yes. If the teacher thinks they didn't try, they should say it was okay but you could have put more effort into writing the poem. Could also give a reason why they thought it was good or not.

A third student saw the local condition in terms of the young poet's academic best interests.

> The teacher should tell the student that the poem is good or bad, whichever is in the students best interest. If the student is good at poetry or writing, then the teacher should tell the student that he or she could do better, If the student usually doesn't turn in any work, then the teacher should ask the student, "Did you try hard on this poem?" Or "Do you think you can do better?" Depending on the answer of the student depends the answer of the teacher.

In summary, three findings distinguished the middle school students' responses from those of their teachers and from those of the preservice teachers and undergraduates in previous studies. First, formalistic beliefs earlier found and reported were voiced by very few of the middle school students. Second, students agreed that the poet's questions should be answered. Last, a large proportion of students argued that elements similar to those in Cavell's criteria for reciprocal conversation and Habermas's (1979, 1984) conception of the ideal speech act should be an essential part of the teaching conversation.

Discussion

In spite of their training and experience, most of the middle school language arts teachers in our study addressed our teaching problem in ways very similar to those of the preservice teachers in Pajares and Bengston (1995) and the psychology students in Bengston (1991), and this gives us cause for concern. As we established in the introduction, this concern is grounded on our view of teaching as a rhetorical transaction that depends for its success on teachers, first, appreciating the importance of local conditions in their practice of pedagogy (Cronbach, 1975)

and, second, having the responsibility to say what they mean and to mean what they say in the teaching conversation (Cavell, 1969). Most of the teachers in our sample would not have responded to the writer's questions about his poem in the reciprocal conversational mode of Cavell or in the ideal speech situation of Habermas (1979, 1984). Their imagined instructional strategies were strongly informed by formalist beliefs about what they believed to be sound pedagogy. As a consequence, their aims led them to minimize the importance of what the student actually said in his poem. In large part, matters related to truth, significance, and comprehensibility in instruction were sacrificed in favor of following formalistic principles such as the importance of responding positively or the child's need to feel good about his work and himself independent of the work's merits. Honest criticism and instruction were subservient to those aims. Indeed, when teachers spoke of criticism, they generally evoked only the more negative overtones of that process. For these reasons, we believe that the suggested instruction was not very instructive. Moreover, the formal principles of teaching espoused were not only not "additive" to the experience of writing the poem but independent of that experience.

In this light, let us first consider the utility of two of the formal principles voiced by the majority of teachers. One is the learning dictum regarding students' need for positive feedback and teachers having the responsibility of finding something good to say about a student's efforts; the other is the belief that criticism is the enemy of creativity. The reference to the need for feedback can be traced to the common observations in learning studies that improvement from one trial to the next depends on the learner's receipt of information indicating why what is done works or does not work. Of course, feedback can come from the activity itself — teacher directives are required only when learners are unable to detect for themselves how to right things or keep them from going awry. As skill improves, learners become increasingly self-editing — in fact, such independence is a component of competence. But the issue is even more complex than that. Various researchers argue that teachers should temper their knee-jerk reaction to provide such extrinsic inducements and suggest that a more value-neutral, straight-forward performance feedback is both more effective and less manipulative and controlling (e.g., Kohn, 1993; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Others have reported that differing types of positive feedback have different effects. For example, Schunk (1982) discovered that effort attributional feedback of prior performance ("I can tell you've worked hard on this poem") raised the confidence of elementary school children more than did feedback regarding future performance ("If you

continue to work hard, you'll really improve"), and this increase was, in part, responsible for increased skill in their ability to solve math problems. In subsequent experiments, he found that ability feedback ("You're good at writing poetry") had an even stronger effect on confidence and subsequent performance than did effort feedback (Schunk, 1983; Schunk & Gunn, 1986). Of course, ability feedback may also promote a belief in the student that ability is a "fixed" entity over which one has no control rather than an incremental property that can be raised, which complicates the matter further (see Dweck & Leggett, 1988). So the principle that quick and positive feedback is at all times necessary is complicated by a number of factors and should not be taken as a general rule for teaching that applies across contexts. Instead, the principle is dependent on local conditions such as what particular learners already understand about a particular activity, what the precise nature of the feedback is, and what the purpose of the instruction should be.

One reason typically given for withholding negative feedback on the grounds that "criticism is the enemy of creativity" is that teachers may undermine motivation for artistic or self-expression when they impose their own standards of excellence on an activity that ought to be driven by intrinsic interest. Consider this recollection by violinist Andres Cardenes of a lesson learned from his teacher, Josef Gingold. Cardenes was playing a Strauss sonata that he had prepared very carefully.

> As I played it, I thought, All right, Andres, it's great — you're coming off splendidly. When I finished, Mr. Gingold said quietly, "That was lovely, but it just needs a little more patience." Then he played the opening for me. After two bars, I felt that I didn't know the piece at all — the beauty of his sound. After he played, I just couldn't speak. Suddenly I realized how little I knew about violin playing. (Blum, 1991, p. 35)

And here is a telling anecdote related by American composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim about criticism that he received at the age of 15 from famed lyricist Oscar Hammerstein. Sondheim had written his first musical.

> I really thought it was terrific. And when I finished it, I not only wanted Oscar to see it but I wanted him to be the first to read it, because I just knew he and Dick Rodgers would want to produce it immediately and I'd be the first fifteen-year-old ever to have a musical done on Broadway. So I gave it to him one evening and told him to read it objectively, as though he didn't know me — as something that crossed his desk on a totally professional level. And I went home

> that night with delusions of grandeur in my head. I could see my name in lights. Next day, when I got up he called and I went over to his house, and he said,
>
> "Now you want my opinion as though I really didn't know you? Well it's the worst thing I've ever read." And he probably saw that my lower lip began to tremble, and he said, "Now, I didn't say that it was untalented. I said it was terrible. And if you want to know *why* it's terrible I'll tell you."
>
> Hammerstein proceeded from the very first stage direction to go through every song, every scene, every line of dialogue. At the risk of hyperbole, I'd say that afternoon I learned more about songwriting and the musical theater than most people learn in a lifetime. And he did indeed treat me as if I were a professional. He taught me how to structure a song like a one-act play, how essential simplicity is, how much every word counts and the importance of content, of saying what you, not what others songwriters, feel, how to build songs, how to introduce character, how to tell a story, how not to tell a story, the interrelationships between lyric and music . . . all, of course, from his point of view. But he was at least as good a critic as he was a writer. (Zadan, 1994, p. 4)

These are cases in which a learner's experience was such that criticism did not have the inhibiting effect that the teachers' expressed principle predicts. Rather, it may be said that the experience "empowered" Cardenes by enlarging his understanding of the expressive possibilities of Strauss's music and of his own responsibilities as a player, as it did Sondheim by helping him understand how much more he could know than he knew at the moment. Hearne (1987) would say that what each boy learned was the distinction vital to art, namely, that between "the beautiful and the merely pretty or picturesque" (p. 123). And notice that, although Gingold's critical entree is rather gentle ("That was lovely but it just needs a little more patience"), Hammerstein's opening gambit is precisely the sort of harsh rejection so many teachers dread ("it's the worst thing I've ever read") — different boys, different temperaments, different teachers, different relational histories, different effects. If criticism is, in general, the enemy of creativity, then the American musical theater would today lack its most eloquent, and creative, voice.

Let us also emphasize that, like Habermas (1979, 1984), we acknowledge that the ideal speech situation engenders its own sense of responsibility. Good manners and the everyday psychological savvy that all teachers should possess dictate that, when instructing children, honest criticism should be couched in terms that students are capable of understanding and be delivered in ways that have the effect intended. Teachers do well to take seriously their share of responsibility over their pupils' emerging self-beliefs. As several students observed, honesty escorted by unkindness is too often likely to be met with resistance and may have precisely the opposite effect that a teacher might wish. This is not what either Cavell or Habermas or we mean

by sincerity. In fact, we would argue that wielding truth as one would wield a blunt object constitutes both an insincere and unjustifiable speech act. Gentleness, kindness, and tact are fine chaperones of truth and sincerity. Also, we acknowledge that truth must sometimes be withheld, if the speaker should judge that the listener is not, in some way, genuinely ready or able to engage in the speech act. One of our teacher respondents with 30 years of experience addressed this issue directly.

> If students tell you exactly what they are trying to express, and you see that it's not there, I think you have to be real honest about that. That's a very hard thing to do, and there's a couple different ways of doing it. And probably in doing it to be as least threatening as possible with the idea in mind that you want the students to express themselves, but at the same time you want them to become more competent and effective communicators so you give them suggestions: Have you thought of this? Have you tried that? Can you do this? What would happen if? I think you need to be honest without being brutally honest.

Of course, there is nothing in these commonsense safeguards to license subterfuge or the distortion of truth in teaching.

Teachers argued against critical candor primarily because they viewed its possible benefits to writing outweighed by its potential to do the child psychological harm. Building self-confidence and preventing discouragement was seen as setting the stage for authentic self-expression, which they took to be their primary function and, in some cases, the primary function of writing. In part, the concern is that the impressionability of youth makes them vulnerable to being discouraged by adult critiques; hence encouragement is critical at all costs. Recall one teacher's concern that "poetry is not natural for an eighth grader." Students were more generous in their assessments of what a 13-year-old could handle (as well we might expect). We dare say the teachers in our study would, on reflection, agree that there can be terrible losses when expectations are too low.

Criticism can also be perceived as the enemy of creativity if teachers' corrections of their pupil's efforts are viewed as subtle forms of coercion, since such corrections lead students to abandon the standards they begin with for those of the teachers. The argument is that, since artistry is purely subjective, one cannot evaluate the quality of someone else's art, except for oneself, and that personal judgment cannot function authoritatively. Recall the teachers' concern that criticism deprives the student of "ownership" of his work. Clearly, in pressing their pupils to develop their craft along lines the teacher would find pleasing, Gingold and Hammerstein (and

all teachers) bring their personal tastes, call it connoisseurship to bear (see Eisner, 1991). If these tastes were idiosyncratic and not cultured, that would constitute the bullying the teachers fear. However, Gingold and Hammerstein were not proposing to put blinders on their pupils so much as they were attempting to enlarge their sensibility and alert them to the possibilities of language and of craft.

Let us again acknowledge and emphasize that the teachers in our study were well-meaning and keenly concerned with their students' well-being. They framed their responses around issues of authenticity, care, and genuine instruction. But conceptions of authenticity are problematic if they are grounded on implicit theories and formal principles of instruction loose of their contextual moorings and on fragile commitments to truth, significance, and comprehensibility in the teaching conversation. One is not troubled by pretending to like a child's poem to avoid hurt feelings only if the social dimension of "meaning what one says" is secondary to the poet's feeling good about his work independent of the work's merit. Such conceptions devalue meaning what one says both as an educational aim and as a means for achieving that aim. In contrast, students called out for *honesty* and for *academic instruction*. Few of them expressed the formal principles that we have identified, and many argued that their teachers need not surrender truth and instruction to express caring and concern. And they revealed that they could, and would, see through their teachers' efforts at impression management. We resist interpretations to explain their responses with formal principles about their youth and idealism or about their developmental or cognitive stage of functioning. More likely, we believe, is the possibility that children have not yet learned to psychologize and theoretize nomothetically, clever though they are in many and varied matters.

Teachers and students agreed that teachers should respond to the poet in a way that shows they *care*. They differed on how caring should be made manifest. Noddings (1988) described caring as a mode of response in which the needs, wants, and initiations of the other are central, and the carer "feels with the other and acts *in his behalf*" [emphasis added] (p. 220). She added that the ethic of caring is characterized by responsibility and identified a critical part of this responsibility as the obligation to evaluate worthwhile activities. Weinstein (1989) reported that both preservice and inservice teachers cite *caring* as the most important trait of a really good teacher, but "with the exception of providing explanations, the process of enabling a learner to acquire subject matter understandings, strategies for learning, or some other form of content —

was generally omitted in subjects descriptions of good teachers" (p. 58). In a study of middle school students' perceptions of how caring manifests itself in schools, Bosworth (1995) reported that students define caring in terms of academic help. Students identified being helped with school work as the highest ranking category of the caring behaviors that teachers can exhibit in a classroom, and they described the role of the caring teacher in ways similar to those of a learning guide or coach.

In our study, there also was disagreement between teachers and students as to how caring best manifests itself in the teaching conversation. Teachers complicated the connection between caring and instructing by relying on the recipes that formalistic principles provide. Students made no such complications. Perhaps part of the cause for this disagreement may lie in the lens that each uses to view the nature of caring. Numerous researchers and theorists have suggested that early experiences working with children may provide the initial motivation for teachers to select the profession and that these experiences often are coupled with the belief that the teacher's primary task is to nurture and socialize a child, even at the risk of devaluing the belief that the teacher's task is also to help the student acquire formal intellectual content (Book, Byers, & Freeman, 1983; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Lortie, 1975). We believe that the two tasks are not incompatible. And, of course, we suggest that modeling one's own speech on truth significance, comprehensibility and meaning what one says in the teaching conversation, coupled with a willingness to be governed by local conditions as they unfold, constitutes the wiser — more nurturing and socializing and kindly and instructive and authentic and caring — academic *and* interpersonal approaches.

What can fairly be asked is why the teachers' training and experience did not save them from their reliance on formalist prescriptions? Given the similarity between the teachers' responses and those of the preservice teachers in Pajares and Bengston (1995), it is possible that teacher education may hold some answers. Pajares and Bengston suggested that a look at the textbooks used in psychology and education classes, their companion test item banks, and the often dismal handling of case studies will show that mechanistic practices continue in these postpositivist times even though contextual variation is now seen to make the application of formalist theory problematic. Of course, education students and practitioners bear responsibility as well. Numerous researchers have documented how preservice teachers resist accommodating information that is incompatible with their entering perspectives (e.g., Buchman & Schwille,

1983; McDiarmid, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Posner et al., 1982), and Fenstermacher (1979) warned that, despite their best intentions, school practitioners convert educational theorems into mechanistic rules for action. Dewey (1929) suggested that "put badly, they want recipes" (p. 15). James (1899/1983) expressed similar sentiments. Discussing his lectures to Cambridge teachers in 1892, he wrote to a friend about his concern that

> a teacher wrings his very soul out to understand you, and if he does ever understand anything you say, he lies down on it with his whole weight like a cow on a doorstep so that you can neither get out or in with him. He never forgets it or can reconcile anything else you say with it, and carries it to the grave like a scar. Let us hope that all these institutes will help them — I'm afraid the normal schools do not, much. (p. xiv)

Perhaps formal principles used as recipes save teachers in crowded classes from having to think— about the specific child and the poem, the situation at hand — and allow them to routinize and make more efficient their imagined instruction. If so, the danger is clear, for as Myers observed in his introduction to *Talks to Teachers*, "no one can teach mechanically and skillfully. The pupil cannot be reached through an automatic use of recipes from psychology or from any other source" (James, 1899/1983, p. xv). Dewey (1929) worried that the use of these recipes is especially antagonistic to education, for when research findings are reduced "to a rule which is to be uniformly adopted, then, only, is there a result which is objectionable and destructive of the free play of education as an art" (p. 14). Finally, Wolf and Gearhart (1994) worried that teachers are lowering the importance of criticism and substantive instruction as part of the current trend toward process writing. What seems clearer is that the answer to the question with which we began our investigation is that literary interests are not faring well against formalistic beliefs in the struggle for the minds and professional dispositions of language arts teachers.

Let us at this point acknowledge that the formalistic responding of the teachers might have been minimized if we had treated teaching writing as a *well-defined problem*. We could have used a more flawed poem and asked, how can the writer be taught to employ vivid images and avoid clichés? Or we could have provided an essay and avoided the issue of artistic relativism. But we do not see teaching as an activity reducible to deciding how to convey information across contexts. Teachers are responsible for making judgments about what is worth learning under circumstances in which it is not self-evident what becoming informed requires. A

concern for the young poet's feelings and the difficulty of assessing his work makes the injunction to mean what one says a less obvious priority in the circumstances of the dilemma posed by our narrative. But that constitutes an unfair bias only if one supposes that teachers do not regularly confront situations in which they might lose sight of their purposes or find plain speaking inconvenient for the wrong reasons. To this issue, several of the teachers in our study observed that evaluating a poem is in many ways even easier than evaluating an essay.

We want also to acknowledge that individuals can respond in the abstract in ways quite different than they might respond in the concrete. Although teachers in our study may have responded to the imaginary student in our scenario with imagined practices informed by formalist beliefs and with a general disregard for local conditions, teachers do not, in practice, respond to imaginary students in settings devoid of context. Most student/teacher interactions involve a relational history, often deep and rich, and take place within a social context. Results of this study shed some light only on the beliefs that teachers express and the practices they envision and not on the practices in which they actually engage. In fact, the connection between formalist belief and practice represents the logical next avenue of inquiry. Nonetheless, we see two reasons for concern. The first deals with the findings of other researchers regarding how inappropriate actual practices are informed by teachers' beliefs (e.g., Nespor, 1987; Posner et al., 1984; Wolfe & Gerhart, 1994). If, as Peirce observed, beliefs act as "rules for action" (James, 1885/1975, p. 28), there is reason to be concerned with formalistic beliefs bridging the gap between intention and execution. The second reason lies in the fact that the teachers in our study gave themselves license *to respond* — and did so in decontextual and formalistic ways. None asked for additional information about the child or about the student/teacher relational history to better understand local conditions. Only two teachers noted that their imagined responses would depend on the nature of such local conditions, but they too embedded this assertion within a broader structure of formalistic responses. In general, the teachers in our study felt no constraint in rendering a professional judgment given sketchy and unsituated information, and they proffered that judgment laden with formalist principles and a disregard for local conditions. We wonder how often such judgments make the transition to practice, and we ask if that is how professional educators should render professional judgment.

In summary, we suggest that caring for students should be inextricably conjoined with truth in the teaching conversation. In addition, we believe that a perspective of instruction

guided by formalist lenses makes light of Cavell's (1969) practical injunction to be truthful, significant, and comprehensible, and of Habermas's (1979, 1984) validity claims for an ideal speech situation. We take it as self-evident that education is ill-served by such a perspective.

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